THE NEW IRELAND

TEACHING BRIGHT GIRLS OF THE WEST OF IRELAND TO BE SELF-SUPPORTING

Lace Making, the Domestic Science and the Dairy Schools at Benada Abbey—Manner of Meeting the Emigration Problem.

This is the seventh of the series of articles arranged for by The Evening World to give its readers the full knowledge of the making over of the Emerald Isle, a process which is producing extraordinary results in the industries, arts and literature of that country.

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TUBBERCURRY, COUNTY SLIGO, Ireland, Aug. 1.—The train that runs through the mournful mountains of Connemara had just stopped yesterday at one of the little stations when there shrilled on the air a cry of such fearful grief that the passengers in the carriages rushed to the windows to discover its cause. They had not far to look, for just outside the train stood one of those groups that are all too familiar to those who have travelled at all through the south and west of Ireland, the gathering of a family to say goodby to a girl who was going to America.


MISS MARY SYNON

She stood in the centre of the group, a rosy cheeked, black haired, red lipped girl of not more than nineteen years, whose beauty showed even through the handicap of swollen eyelids and reddened eyes. In her left hand she clutched a canvas telescope labelled with the name of one of the ocean liners. With her right she held tightly to the hand of a little girl, evidently her sister, who regarded her with puzzled, troubled eyes. A half dozen men standing in the background were watching her with sorrowful gaze, while the women around her kept up a constant moan, against which one cry, the one that had risen above the noise of the train's coming, shrieked out piercingly from time to time as a woman raised both her arms over her head as if in protest against the fate that was taking her daughter away from her. Once the girl turned to her as if to speak, then turned away quickly. But when the train whistle shrilled she went down on her knees before the crying woman, murmuring terms of endearment in Irish and clutching at the old skirt against which she laid her head. Her mother's arms came down around the girl's neck, then lifted again as she invoked the blessing of God on her child who was leaving her. The engine's bell sounded, the guards came running to lock the carriage doors and the tableaux broke as willing arms lifted the sobbing girl to one of the carriages. But the picture of that heartbroken mother praying for the safety of the girl who was going from Ireland, kept silhouetting itself against every black mountain of Connemara.

For any traveller, any railroad guard in Ireland, will tell how common is the occurrence, even now, when the emigration has been lowered in rate by the influence of the Irish Revival. It was the number and poignancy of these partings, revealed to him as he went through these parts of Ireland that added Neil Primrose, Lord Rosebery's son, as an unexpected recruit to the Home Rule party. And it is the number and poignancy of these scenes that have made the Irish Revival a live issue, not of literature and of art, but of men and women and children.

CHOICEST YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN COME TO AMERICA.

The disease that has eaten at the heart of Ireland has been the draining away of her choicest young men and women over seas to America. For generations emigration was preached to Ireland by government officials as the only remedy for economic conditions. The state subsidy toward emigration made the going easier than the staying. England has only herself to blame that Ireland to-day is not only a bankrupt nation, but one costing her conqueror £2,000,000 a year over her revenues. The pull of the great cities from the country was aggravated in Ireland by such conditions of land tenure as were known nowhere in the world. Even since the amelioration of the more terrible conditions by which evictions were common procedures and where rents depended solely on the whim of the landlords, there is land trouble in Connemara, where much of the good land is still let under leases at a competition rate to graziers. A competition rent in a land-hungry country is a ruinous economic principle, especially in Connaught, where the graziers are for the most part shopkeepers who rent land simply as prairie, expending no labor or capital upon it, and often subletting it at still higher rates. With such leases there is no incentive for the young men or the young women to stay at home. From an American point of view the emigration may be for the improvement of the individual, although a month in Ireland is sufficient to make even a "tripper" doubt if the emigrant does not suffer in acquiring material prosperity in exchange for those finer things of the spirit that the people of Ireland have managed to keep in spite of poverty, or, perhaps, because of poverty.

With the lands still held in such way that their cultivation has practically no profit, with the industries of the south and west shut down and only beginning to revive under the beneficent care of the Gaelic League and its correlated Industrial Development Associations, going to America has been the only way open to the young men and the girls of this section of Ireland. The problem of holding them at home has been one that

away from the railroad, set on the banks of the Rivey Moy, and in the midst of a district known to the Congested Districts Board as one of the poorest in all the West of Ireland. The poverty of the people in this section has been notorious in a land of poor. And yet the apparent fertility of the land stands even to-day as a rebuke to the landlord system that depleted Ireland of sustenance. But the story of Benada is the old story. The story of Benada Abbey is the history that to-day is making.

Eight years ago Sister Alice Walsh, Mother Superioress of the Abbey, called a conference of her community to consider ways and means of relief for the poverty of the district and for the prevention of emigration, which was on the increase, from the neighborhood. The Sisters of Benada knew the conditions of the cottage homes in the district better than any board of examiners. They knew every story of want, and misery, and privation, through the countryside. Inspired by the necessity of action, they made an appeal to the Congested Districts Board for financial aid. They themselves agreed, out of their limited means, to supply teachers, implements, material, if the Board would help in the construction of a small building that might be used as a lace-making school.

The frame building which the Sisters erected with alight aid from the Congested Districts Board was the beginning of the Techinael School of Benada. To-day, with several additions, which show how it has been enlarged to meet the constantly growing demands upon it, the lace school is one of the largest in Ireland, although it is not large enough to accommodate the girls who desire to attend it. And the fame of the Benada lace has gone around the world, for it has not only won prizes at all the great expositions but it has been exhibited in the Gaelic League exhibits in America by Father O'Flanagan. Brigid O'Quinn, one of the girls who exhibited the Benada laces and who is still in America with the work, came from the Benada School.

At the Lace School to-day nearly a hundred girls were at work under the direction of two Sisters and of ten graduate pupils. The regular attendance of Benada is nearly three hundred, but attendance falls off in the summer months. The interest of the girls in their work was manifest, and no wonder, for it has been work that has brought them not only hope but actual comfort. During the first year Benada paid the girls £1,000 for the proceeds of their work. Last year £15,000 was distributed among the girls of the neighborhood. That money, distributed among the cottages that dot the hillsides of South Sligo, has changed an entire district from a discouraged, hopeless, poverty stricken settlement into a hopeful, cheerful, active, industrious centre.

OTHER THINGS TAUGHT AT THE ABBEY.

Nor is the making of lace, supplying the families of the neighborhood with a means of livelihood, all that the Abbey has done for the district. In addition to the manufacture of lace of such cobweb fineness that its winning of prizes is easily understood, Benada teaches the girls of the district less artistic but none the less valuable lessons. There is a Technical School of Domestic Science and Dairying that are models.

The technical school of domestic science has the advantage of improved methods applied with the most practical ideas to the conditions with which the girls have to cope. Side by side with modern ranges are the open hearths which are in use in most of the cottages. The Sisters in direction of the work show the girls of the school how to use both the hearth and the range for baking and cooking. They also work with those materials which may be had in most of the homes from which the girls come. And so in addition to the cooking classes, we have had to start market gardening classes, supplying all the roots and seeds. You may think that they would have tried it for themselves, but you must remember that for every improvement that the Irish tenant put on his land in the times that ended only ten years ago, he had to pay a higher rent. And when there has been no incentive to industry for several hundred years, it's not easy to build it up in a decade.

But the number of tiny gardens visible around the cottages of the district testify to the way that Benada has built up industry in less than a decade. And the Benada butter, made by an improved churning system, in the convent dairies, has set a standard of cleanliness for the entire district that has raised the price of the product as a reward of industry.

Every morning at 6 o'clock the girls who are living at the school while they attend the work of the technical branches milk the cows. After mass and after breakfast they have a recreation time of a half-hour, then an hour's class work. By that time the cream is ready for the hand separators. Then the actual work of the butter-making begins. Care and cleanliness are the standards. And to prove that the dairy school is no haphazard enterprise stands the fact that no girl is graduated from it without at least six months of attendance. For the domestic science course two years work is demanded.

HELP TO GIRLS WHO HAVE COME TO AMERICA.

"The girls who have gone to America," said Sister Aloysius, "and there have been some, although all our work is for the purpose of keeping the girls at home, giving them work enough to support them and their families, declare that the work they learned here has been of such assistance to them that they advise their younger sisters to learn it. And so, even in the way we desire least, it works out well. The results that please us most are right in the cottages over there."

In connection with Benada there is a National School attended by 250 children from the neighborhood, and an orphan asylum. The national school is really a feeder for the lace school, as the girls of the former, seeing the prosperity that crowns the work of the girls of the latter, take an interest in the means toward money-making and enter the late school as soon as they are graduated from the national.

It is the hope of the Sisters of Benada to enlarge both the lace and the technical schools sufficiently to meet the demands made upon them by their increased attendance. For they have already seen the great results accomplished at their door by the giving of a means of livelihood and a fair wage and it is their dream that such work as the Abbey does will in time spread so that the women of Ireland may light the way to conditions so improved that through her own efforts Ireland may come into her own again.